

City of Costa Mesa

City Council Meeting

Service Request Follow-up

Meeting Date: February 17, 2004

TO: City Council

FROM: Bruce A. Hartley, Maintenance Services Manager

DATE: March 8, 2004

SUBJECT: Response to Request #R-021704-4: Follow Up – Victoria Street Landscape

During the 'Public Comments' portion of the City Council Meeting of February 17, 2004, Mari Erin Roth, 990 Oak Street, Costa Mesa, addressed the Council regarding the landscaping on Victoria Street, west of Placentia Avenue on the south side of the street. Ms. Roth complained that the 'xeriscape' plants were being removed and replaced with turf and asked that no more areas be replanted with turf.

As part of the environmental approval for the Victoria Street widening project in approximately 1990, the City Council approved a plant palette for the parkways that included drought tolerant groundcover and shrubs. The use of turf was rejected at that time due to the higher water consumption it would require. The limits of the widening project extended from Harbor Blvd. west to Pacific Ave., a distance of approximately 1.6 miles.

Since the completion of the widening project in 1991, City maintenance staff and several City-paid landscape maintenance contractors have struggled to keep weeds from infiltrating the planted areas throughout the entire length of the project. The landscape endured a cyclic pattern of looking good then to being overgrown with weeds. In many areas it never realized the healthy vigorous appearance envisioned by the architect and Council. A meeting took place in July 2001, with then-Mayor Cowan, Allan Roeder, Bill Morris and Bruce Hartley, where the condition of the Victoria Street landscape was discussed. Following that meeting, Maintenance Services embarked on a program to analyze the condition of the streetscape along Victoria Street, from Harbor Blvd. to Pacific Dr. The goal was to develop a long-term management plan to restore the aesthetic quality of the plant material and develop an effective strategy to ensure the condition of the landscape would consistently be pleasing to motorists and pedestrians. The Victoria streetscape should be a source of community pride rather than an embarrassment, which it often was in the past.

Maintenance Services Division staff conducted a survey of existing conditions and evaluated probable causes for the various problems identified. The majority of the landscape problems identified were related to three causes. 1) Over-irrigating. 2) Concentrated foot traffic in groundcover areas. 3) Phytotoxicity of the herbicides labeled for use against yellow nutsedge and bermudagrass, to the Honeysuckle groundcover. Yellow nutsedge and bermudagrass are noxious weeds that are problematic in certain areas.

The City Council was provided the results of the survey and a detailed proposal to replant the most challenging areas in an Informational Memorandum dated December 21, 2001 (Please contact Maintenance Service at 714-754-5123 for copy, not included due to number of attachments and photographs). Without objection by the Council, Maintenance Services embarked on renovation of certain parkway landscaped areas along the south side of Victoria Street from Harbor Blvd. to American Avenue. The areas replanted with turf were those areas that had very heavy clay soils and were consistently infested with weeds. Due to the high moisture, low light (due to soundwalls creating shade) and repetitive herbicide applications necessary to control weeds, the groundcover in these areas (Honeysuckle) never grew with any vigor and rarely looked healthy or attractive.

The turf installed in the renovated areas has been well received by the public and is growing in a healthy vigorous manner. The areas require no herbicide applications and are very low water using during all but the mid-summer months. The heavy soils and shady conditions have proven to be well tolerated by the turf and has resulted in reductions in the use of water, chemicals and labor. The areas are very attractive and low maintenance.

Ms. Roth refers to the plant palette as being 'xeriscape' along Victoria Street. In reality it is not a xeriscape. The shrubs selected are not any more drought tolerant than most shrubs, and in fact, the Honeysuckle grows very poorly without frequent irrigation. At the time the plant palette was approved there was a drought, and although the City does not endorse planting high water using plant material in public places, the importance of maintaining this thoroughfare in an attractive manner is very high. After many years of having an average looking landscape along Victoria Street, the areas renovated with Tall Fescue turf and Myoporum groundcover have proven to be consistently attractive, low water-using, low maintenance and have reduced the need for herbicides tremendously. A comparison of annual water use in the year 2000 versus the year 2003 (before and after the renovation) shows a reduction in use in one of the renovated areas from 1.16 million gallons to .82 million gallons. This is an annual water savings of over 300,000 gallons.

The Maintenance Services Division believes the decision to allow several areas to be renovated was a good one. It has been borne out in the improved appearance, the reduction in maintenance, and the greatly reduced chemical and water usage. At this time there are no plans to expand this program. However, at some point in the future, the Maintenance Services Division may return to the Council for approval to continue renovation of areas that are problematic to maintain in an acceptable condition.

C: Mari Erin Roth
990 Oak Street
Costa Mesa, CA

Allan Roeder, City Manager
William J. Morris, Public Services Director